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Report of the Secretary-General on the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel

I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 2359 (2017) of 21 June 2017, the Security Council welcomed the deployment of the Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel throughout the territories of its contributing countries, with a view to restoring peace and security in the Sahel region.[1] The Council also welcomed its strategic concept of operations, which was endorsed by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union at its 679th meeting, held on 13 April 2017.

2. The Security Council requested me to report on the activities of the Joint Force, including on its operationalization, challenges encountered and possible measures for further consideration, as well as on ways to mitigate any adverse impact of its military operations on civilians, including women and children, within four months of the adoption of the resolution. To that end, between 6 and 14 September, I deployed an assessment team to States members of G-5 Sahel. The team comprised staff from the Departments of Peacekeeping Operations, Field Support and Political Affairs, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) and the United Nations Office for West Africa and the Sahel (UNOWAS). Its findings have informed the drafting of the present report, prepared in close collaboration with the States members of G-5 Sahel and the African Union.

II. Challenges facing the Sahel

3. The security situation in the Sahel deteriorated significantly following the Libya crisis of 2011, the Mali crisis of 2012 and the insurgency led by Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad, commonly known as Boko Haram, which exacerbated pre-existing vulnerabilities. In its report of January 2012 on the impact of the Libyan crisis on the Sahel region (S/2012/42), the assessment mission dispatched by my predecessor outlined how governance shortfalls, poverty and the devastating impact of climate change, including successive droughts and food insecurity, had already resulted in serious humanitarian emergencies. Local conflicts

[1] The Sahel region goes beyond the territory of the States members of the Group of Five for the Sahel and comprises also Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, the Niger, Nigeria and Senegal.

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over access to natural resources, exacerbated by the continuous marginalization of parts of the population, threaten livelihoods and aggravate living conditions. While the majority of these challenges pre-date the Libyan conflict, the resulting mass displacement of people, increase in migration and influx of weapons and armed combatants from northern Libya further exacerbated the already precarious situation in the Sahel. The subsequent crisis in Mali in 2012 resulted in the complete erosion of State authority in the northern and central parts of the country and provided a safe haven for violent extremist groups with ties to Al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb, Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and groups in Libya, which subsequently expanded into Burkina Faso and the Niger. In such a context, Governments are unable to sustain the delivery of social services, including access to education and health care, while ensuring the safety and security of their population.

4. Countries of the Sahel have repeatedly called for the creation of a regional military capacity to respond to threats more effectively, showcasing a collective determination to enhance regional ownership. In November 2015, the Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel countries decided to create a joint force to combat terrorism and transnational criminal networks. This was followed by high-level consultations in 2016 and 2017, including with the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). During the African Union summit held in January 2017, the Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel countries informed me of their decision to formally establish a joint force, which they subsequently announced during their sixth ordinary summit, held in Bamako on 6 February. On that occasion, I pledged my support for this commendable initiative and promised to address the many challenges facing the Sahel holistically. Important as it is, the Joint Force initiative, in order to be successful and sustainable, should dovetail into a comprehensive package, bringing together the security, humanitarian and development aspects. The United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, which was endorsed by the Security Council in 2013, provides a framework for United Nations support for such a response. To speed up its implementation, earlier in 2017, I assigned the Deputy Secretary-General the task of mobilizing the entire system to support the region through an Executive Committee working group on the Sahel, comprising the heads of United Nations offices, agencies, funds and programmes.

5. Terrorist attacks in Bamako, Niamey and Ouagadougou between 2015 and 2017, as well as continuous attacks on defence and security forces in the tri-border area between Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger and frequent deadly attacks on United Nations peacekeepers, are reminders of a deteriorating situation that carries serious risks of spillover effects on regional and international peace and security if not addressed rapidly. These attacks have further strengthened the political resolve and shared sense of urgency to render the Joint Force operational as swiftly as possible and to launch its first joint border operations in the Liptako-Gourma region before the end of 2017.

Governance

6. Weak political, financial and security governance remain at the core of instability in the Sahel. The limited presence of national institutions in remote and border areas has further disenfranchised parts of the population and actively fuelled the rapid growth of violent extremism across the region, contributing to the creation of contested and ungoverned spaces. Socioeconomic exclusion and deprivation, poverty and underdevelopment create grievances that have been exploited by violent extremist groups. Consequently, such groups have encroached on areas in which the State is largely absent, such as in northern and central Mali, but also increasingly in northern Burkina Faso, specifically targeting State civilian, security or military officials and institutions. The presence of those groups has further undermined

access to basic services and resulted in the closure of schools and health-care centres, further eroding State authority. In some cases, extremist groups have formed alternatives to governance and exploited existing tensions between herders and pastoralists, as well as between ethnic groups, perpetuating the risk of armed violence. In other cases, they enjoy the support of disenfranchised citizens, having established parallel administrations, including taxation systems in return for protection and the provision of essential basic services, including justice services.

Border protection and migration

7. The past five years have seen a dramatic increase in mass displacements and irregular migration across the Sahel. As at the time of reporting, some 4.9 million people had been forcibly displaced, demonstrating the toll of the conflict and violence in the region. Most of the displaced have lost their livelihoods and are often being hosted in already highly vulnerable communities. Migrants transit through all G-5 Sahel countries, although the vast majority cross the Niger and, to a lesser extent, Mali. The facilitation of irregular migration has become a major source of income for the population of parts of northern Mali and the northern Niger and has led to an increase in criminal activity based on smuggling of and trafficking in persons. This state of affairs highlights the need for a shared vision and a joint approach to improving border security and to better control with respect to the movement of persons and goods in West Africa, beyond the States members of G-5 Sahel.

8. The members of the assessment team found that the level and sophistication of border protection varied greatly across the region. While Chad and Mauritania had invested significantly in border security, Mali and the Niger had been calling upon the international community for support since 2011, owing to their limited capacity to ensure effective border control and to contain the influx of weapons and fighters from Libya. The team found that little progress had been made in that domain and that State presence in border areas in northern Burkina Faso and northern and central Mali had, in fact, decreased.

Security

9. Following the Libyan crisis, large quantities of weapons and ammunition from Libyan stockpiles were smuggled into the Sahel region. In addition, the Sahelo-Saharan region has long been an area where illicit trafficking has thrived, with Mali, Mauritania and the Niger at the centre of trading routes. The recent increase in drug trafficking, combined with an increase in smuggling of and trafficking in persons, has provided new sources of income for terrorist armed groups, in some cases with the complicity of government officials, and has further destabilized the region. Consequently, and as a result of widespread neglect, equipment and training shortfalls and a lack of adequate accountability and oversight, security forces are unwilling or ill-equipped to respond to such threats.

10. Consequently, G-5 Sahel countries have progressively augmented their security spending, as evidenced by an ever-increasing share of their national budgets being devoted to security and defence expenditures. This has been true in particular for countries confronted with multiple security threats. Chad and the Niger, for example, face simultaneous crises on their borders with Libya on the one hand and the Boko Haram insurgency in the south on the other. Chad also has had to contend with the deterioration of security along its borders with the Sudan and the Central African Republic, and the Niger has faced similar issues along its border with Mali. Mauritania significantly invested in national security after suffering several terrorist attacks in the early 2000s. Interlocutors in Chad and Mauritania reported that they had to prioritize defence spending over development initiatives.

Officials in the Niger also noted that threats were rapidly evolving, requiring dynamic responses.

Development

11. The socioeconomic situation in the Sahel, a region with economies that are poorly diversified and highly dependent on agriculture, pastoralism and the exploitation of mineral resources, is marked by a rapidly growing youth population, worsening inequalities, including in the provision of basic social services, and an uneven distribution of resources. Poor financial governance and an increased reliance on imports, resulting in high exposure to fluctuations in the price of raw materials, have directly affected national revenues and aggravated dependencies on foreign assistance. These trends have been further exacerbated by environmental degradation and the rampant effects of climate change, which have also had an adverse impact on agricultural output and rural development.

Humanitarian impact

12. Currently, some 24 million people are in need of life-saving assistance in the Sahel region. Humanitarian actors have increasingly had to step in to provide basic social services to vulnerable and marginalized communities, filling the void left by the erosion of State authority. As a result, the sheer size of the Sahelo-Saharan region, which features some of the highest demographic rates in Africa combined with a deteriorating security situation, represents a significant challenge for humanitarian access to the affected population, as the magnitude and multitude of issues to be addressed far exceed existing humanitarian capacities. The capacity of humanitarian actors to respond to needs is further hampered by the lack of available funding. As at the time of reporting, only 49 per cent of the total $2.7 billion required for humanitarian assistance in 2017 in the region had been received.

13. The region is now trapped in a vicious cycle in which poor political and security governance, combined with chronic poverty and the effects of climate change, has contributed to the spread of insecurity. The rise of terrorism and lawlessness has further undermined State authority, leaving Governments unable to provide for or protect their citizens, which, in turn, has contributed to radicalization and further instability.

14. In order to support the region in addressing the root causes of instability beyond a military response, I have reoriented the United Nations system to streamline and enhance its support through the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel, developed in 2013. As at the time of reporting, the Executive Committee working group on the Sahel had already agreed to a clear division of labour among United Nations entities in the region, had initiated a mapping exercise of ongoing programmes by the United Nations and other actors in order to identify gaps and was developing an investment strategy for mobilizing resources.

15. In addition to the United Nations, other international and regional organizations have developed comprehensive regional strategic frameworks. Those organizations include the European Union (2012), the World Bank (2013), ECOWAS (2013), the African Union (2014) and the G-5 Sahel (2014).

III. Joint Force of the Group of Five for the Sahel

A. Strategic concept of operations

16. Pursuant to the summit of the Heads of State of G-5 Sahel of 6 February 2017, the G-5 Sahel Defence and Security Committee developed a strategic concept of operations, which was endorsed by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union at its 679th meeting, as reflected in its communiqué of 13 April 2017. The Peace and Security Council authorized the immediate deployment of up to 5,000 military, police and civilian personnel for a renewable 12-month period, with the aim of restoring peace in the Sahel. The States members of G-5 Sahel also developed the command architecture for the Joint Force, a memorandum of understanding on extraterritoriality and a budget estimate of €423 million for the first year of operations. In his letter to me dated 27 April 2017, transmitting the concept of operations and the communiqué of the Peace and Security Council, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, stressed that the Peace and Security Council had urged the Security Council to adopt a resolution approving the deployment of the Joint Force and authorizing me to identify modalities of support for the Joint Force, including through MINUSMA and within the strategic partnership for collaboration that links the United Nations and the African Union. I conveyed this strategic document to the Security Council for further consideration in my letter dated 15 May, resulting in the adoption of resolution 2359 (2017), in which the Council welcomed the establishment of the Joint Force.

17. In the concept of operations, reference is made to the deteriorating political, security, humanitarian and socioeconomic situation in the Sahel, underlining the adverse impact of the spread of terrorism on both the lives of its population and the State presence, as it undermines Governments' abilities to provide basic social services, exacerbates existing humanitarian crises and obstructs development. Consequently, the Joint Force is given the mandate to (a) combat terrorism and transnational organized crime; (b) contribute to the restoration of State authority and the return of refugees and internally displaced persons; (c) facilitate humanitarian operations; and (d) contribute to development activities in the Sahel.

18. The strategic concept of operations delineates a two-phased approach to addressing security challenges in the Sahel, with an immediate focus, in phase 1, on border security in three strategic sectors: (a) along the borders of Mali and Mauritania (Sector West); (b) in the Liptako-Gourma region along the borders of Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger (Central Sector); and (c) along the border between Chad and the Niger (Sector East). In phase 2, the Joint Force should be able to conduct centralized operations in one or more locations in G-5 Sahel territory.

19. The assessment team considered that joint border operations under phase 1 would prioritize the Central Sector in the immediate term, with the aim of neutralizing terrorist armed groups; preventing trafficking in persons, drugs and arms; monitoring movements of weapons, ammunition and explosives; and, consequently, disrupting supply chains and cutting these groups off from their sources of funding. Officials in States members of G-5 Sahel further informed the assessment team that such operations would consist of joint and coordinated patrols by armed forces of the contributing countries, on their own territories on each side of their respective borders. Sectors extend 50 km into each country on both sides of the border, although Chad and the Niger have decided to increase this to 100 km to both sides of their joint border in Sector East. The MINUSMA Force Commander recommended applying that decision to the Central Sector and Sector West as well. In its communiqué issued following its meeting held in Sévaré, Mali, on

14 September, the Defence and Security Committee endorsed the decision. The Joint Force exercises unified command through its headquarters in Sévaré, its three sector headquarters in Wour, Chad, in Nbeiket el Ahouach, Mauritania and in Niamey, and its seven cross-sectoral battalion command posts.

20. The Joint Force would be able to pursue terrorist elements into the territory of a neighbouring country, beyond the 50 km delineating each sector, but would be required to notify and seek approval from the Joint Force Commander in advance. The modalities for hot pursuit are further specified in the memorandum of understanding on extraterritoriality.

21. The assessment team was informed by regional stakeholders that phase 1 would build on 16 joint border operations that had been conducted by States members of G-5 Sahel over the past two years with the support of French forces. Those operations will continue to complement the ongoing operations and activities carried out by MINUSMA, the European Union Training Mission, the European Union capacity-building mission in Mali and the French-led Operation Barkhane. In northern and central Mali, joint border operations will contribute to an enabling environment for MINUSMA to focus on its core mandated tasks in support of the Malian peace process. That will require effective and systematic coordination mechanisms and exchanges of information. Going forward, the quarterly quadripartite meetings between MINUSMA, the European Union Training Mission, Operation Barkhane and the Malian defence and security forces will engage the participation of the leadership of the Joint Force and provide a forum for coordination and information-sharing.

22. Phase 2 would envisage the deployment of a full-fledged force operating throughout the Sahel to neutralize terrorist armed groups and criminal organizations. However, the strategic concept of operations does not provide details on the scale and scope, the command and control structure or the prerogatives of such a force. The timing for the transition to phase 2 has also not been specified. Discussions with interlocutors in the capitals of the States members of G-5 Sahel revealed that conceptions of phase 2 varied significantly by country. Notably, Chad and the Niger advocated a phased approach whereby phase 2 would not begin until phase 1 had been completed, borders secured and a State presence, in particular through the return of security forces, restored. Officials in Chad also noted that the Joint Force was often perceived as an additional effort being made to respond to the Malian crisis. They highlighted the seriousness of threats facing Chad and its neighbours that were entirely disconnected from Mali and stressed the need to address those threats simultaneously. For officials of Burkina Faso and Mali, the launch of phase 1 did not preclude planning for phase 2. Meanwhile, interlocutors in Mauritania advocated making phases 1 and 2 operational concurrently, expressing reservations with regard to rendering the Joint Force further operational under phase 1, pending the adoption of a more solid mandate under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations and the provision of adequate financial and other means. Officials of the Niger echoed those sentiments and called upon the international community to step up its support for the Joint Force. Interlocutors in all five countries noted that the strategic concept of operations was a "living document" that would be subject to further revision to reflect ongoing discussions on the end-state of the Joint Force and the means to attain it, as well as the gradual establishment of a regional force.

23. The strategic concept of operations focuses on military operations and provides few details on its non-military capacities. The assessment team learned that the police component of the Joint Force was expected to comprise 105 provost police elements, who would be embedded within the seven battalions and be responsible for judicial police missions and for combating transnational organized crime and trafficking in persons. At the present stage, the concept of operations does

not further specify the level of coordination and collaboration between the police officers and the military elements and operations envisaged under phase 1 or phase 2. In particular, detailed guidelines for law enforcement concomitant to military operations, including all legal procedures concerning detainees, investigations and prosecutions, as well as possible extraditions, would have to be clearly defined in advance, based on the memorandum of understanding on extraterritoriality. Courts, judges and facilities would also need to be identified and be provided with sufficient means to function in synergy with operations on the ground. The lack of documentation, including a database of individuals sought under national jurisdictions, will also have to be addressed as a priority. That will also require fostering judicial cooperation between countries in the subregion, while ensuring the safe, secure and humane management of detainees.

B. Operationalization of the Joint Force

24. Since the endorsement of the strategic concept of operations by the Peace and Security Council of the African Union in April, G-5 Sahel countries, with the support of their partners, have taken major steps to render the Joint Force operational. In addition to the development of its normative framework, G-5 Sahel has accelerated its efforts to establish the central command and headquarters of the Joint Force in Sévaré, as well as the headquarters for the Central Sector in Niamey. General Didier Dacko of Mali was appointed Joint Force Commander in June and has since deployed to Sévaré, as have staff officers from Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger.

25. During its visits to G-5 Sahel capitals, as well as to Sévaré, the assessment team not only witnessed the progress made, but also observed the levels of preparedness across the three sectors and five countries. Buildings and structures in Sévaré and Niamey had been refurbished, reinforced and equipped with computers and communication systems. The Joint Force headquarters in Sévaré, inaugurated by the President of Mali, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita, on 9 September, has already attained initial operational capability. The refurbishment of the command post for the Central Sector in Niamey is also progressing swiftly and is expected to be completed in October 2017. The establishment of command posts for Sector East in Wour and Sector West in Nbeiket el Ahouach, however, has not yet begun. With the exception of Mauritania, all the G-5 Sahel countries have identified their required battalions. Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger have also begun to mobilize troops and equipment within their means. Nevertheless, equipment shortfalls are hampering and delaying the deployment of troops. Chad and Mauritania have yet to identify and deploy the staff officers whom they intend to contribute to the central command.

26. Between 27 September and 3 October, an operational planning group met regularly to draft the operational orders for the first border operation of the Joint Force in the Central Sector at the end of October. Through its force and sector headquarters, the Joint Force provides the framework for developing a more comprehensive and long-term strategy over the ad hoc joint operations that had been carried out to date. The Joint Force has the potential to promote additional ownership and capacity-building by the armed forces of G-5 Sahel countries for addressing national and regional security matters more effectively. Currently, the armed forces of the G-5 Sahel countries rely heavily on their partnership with Operation Barkhane, which comprises 4,000 military personnel deployed in the Sahel. Since August 2014, more than 5,300 military personnel from G-5 Sahel have taken part in 250 joint operational instructions with Operation Barkhane. Additional support would be required to allow the G-5 Sahel countries to reach full operational capacity.

C. Challenges and risks encountered

Political framework

27. The advancement and consolidation of the Joint Force need to be paired with deeper reflection on development and stabilization, as well as with the restoration of State authority and good governance. Coherent approaches that avoid shifting security threats to areas that do not benefit from similar engagement and support also need to be developed. To that end, and to ensure complementarity with development initiatives, a sound institutional architecture into which the Joint Force would be embedded needs to be further developed. Currently, of the decision-making bodies described in the annex on command architecture to the strategic concept of operations, none is equipped to play this role. The assessment team found that officials in all G-5 Sahel countries concurred with that analysis but expressed concern that the development of an institutional framework might result in additional layers of bureaucracy and consequently hamper the Joint Force's capacity to respond to threats swiftly.

28. While the assessment team determined that the question of offensive operations in phase 2 still required further discussion, as the strategic concept of operations did not provide sufficient clarity, the positions of the G-5 Sahel countries on the matter vary significantly. The establishment of a full-fledged regional counter-terrorism force would have legal implications, including with respect to the question of mandate, support options and the protection of civilians and human rights. In addition, if the G-5 Sahel countries decide to aim to make phase 2 fully operational, a joint vision and a shared definition of the scale and scope of such a force, as well as its end state, would be required. Equipping a regional force to conduct counter-terrorism operations would also require adequate financial and logistical support, including for equipment, operational coordination and intelligence-sharing processes, as well as an efficient communication system and a solid human rights compliance framework.

29. Ensuring interoperability, cooperation and effective coordination among the Joint Force, MINUSMA and national and international armed forces will also remain a challenge going forward. In that regard, existing mechanisms, such as the quarterly quadripartite meetings in Mali and the deployment of liaison officers from MINUSMA and Operation Barkhane to the Joint Force's headquarters, will facilitate information-sharing and planning, thereby contributing to an enabling environment for MINUSMA and facilitating operational deconfliction.

Human rights, humanitarian and protection-related concerns

30. The proposed counter-terrorism operations of the Joint Force present significant risks and challenges in relation to human rights and international humanitarian law. In central Mali, terrorist armed groups are often firmly entrenched within the population and, in some cases, have taken on State functions. In such a complex setting, military operations that do not fully respect the human rights due diligence policy on United Nations support to non-United Nations security forces might not only adversely harm civilians and result in human rights violations, but also risk contributing to further destabilization, including fuelling youth radicalization. Officials in G-5 Sahel countries have acknowledged the necessity for mechanisms to prevent and address human rights violations as well as for integrating a civilian dimension into the planning and conduct of Joint Force operations. However, existing compliance frameworks at the national level often remain limited to training. They lack adequate predeployment mechanisms (screening, robust training and protection of civilians planning) and post-deployment

accountability mechanisms. The absence of a satisfactory human rights compliance framework for the Joint Force compounds the risk of human rights violations being committed during its operations.

31. Nevertheless, counter-terrorism operations would be more likely to harm civilians and result in violations of international human rights and humanitarian law in the absence of United Nations support. They therefore warrant its engagement through the establishment of a robust compliance framework under the human rights due diligence policy. While the need to protect civilians and safeguard humanitarian assistance and human rights is recognized in the strategic concept of operations, there is little information on how such protection could be planned and implemented, nor on the composition and role of the envisaged civilian component of the Joint Force. Lastly, the incorporation of gender perspectives and issues pertaining to the protection of women and children in all aspects of the strategic concept of operations, as recognized in resolution 2359 (2017), including the likelihood that the Joint Force could encounter children associated with armed groups and the requirement for a clear procedure for handing them over to child protection actors, would also need to be ensured.

Equipment gaps and financing

32. While significant steps have been taken towards making phase 1 operational, significant challenges remain. The Sector East headquarters in Wour and Sector West headquarters in Nbeiket el Ahouach are in remote and isolated areas. These facilities and the battalion-level command posts will require significant investments for their construction and to render them fully operational, protected and secure. Currently, such investments are feasible only through bilateral partners. Those locations will also need to be sustained with a supply chain, which will require both force and convoy protection. Once established, however, the garrisons would serve as outposts and could significantly enhance the Joint Force's surveillance and manoeuvre capabilities and provide an important tactical advantage with regard to monitoring the area and controlling trafficking routes.

33. The equipment shortfalls of the States members of G-5 Sahel, combined with their limited capacity to mobilize assets, hamper their ability to prepare the Joint Force and render it operational. Significant equipment and capability gaps remain unaddressed. The G-5 Sahel countries have identified the following key needs that require additional bilateral or multilateral support: (a) setting up the remaining sector headquarters and command posts; (b) equipment for a light mechanized company in each of the seven battalions; (c) intelligence and reconnaissance capabilities, including unmanned aerial systems, and relevant training; (d) interoperable information and communications infrastructure to support command and control, linking the Joint Force headquarters with the sector headquarters and command posts; (e) force protection; (f) counter-improvised explosive device measures, including material and training of specialists; (g) individual personal protective equipment, ballistic vests and helmets; (h) night-vision devices; (i) air and ground transportation; and (j) medical and casualty evacuation capacity.

34. The States members of G-5 Sahel have developed a €423 million budget estimate for establishing the Joint Force and rendering it operational, including its first year of operations. As at the time of reporting, only a few partners had come forward, and only one quarter of the budget had been funded. Given its size and the high potential future costs associated with eventually making a full-fledged anti-terrorism force operational, mobilizing sustainable and consistent financial support over several years will remain a significant challenge. The lack of an overarching institutional framework also presents challenges with regard to the Joint Force's capacity to channel and disburse donor contributions. The development of a

sound financial mechanism to receive and oversee the disbursing of contributions received would be instrumental in gaining donor confidence and encouraging more partners to come forward.

IV. Support already mobilized and measures for further consideration

35. Under resolution 2359 (2017), States members of G-5 Sahel have the responsibility to provide the Joint Force with adequate resources and are urged to continue their efforts towards rendering it sustainable, viable and effectively operational. During the extraordinary summit of the Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel countries, held in Bamako on 2 July, member States pledged a contribution of €10 million each to the budget of the Joint Force, for a total of €50 million, while the European Union committed itself to contributing €50 million and France €8 million, which included equipment. Combined, those pledges amount to €108 million, or roughly a quarter of the budget estimate. Mali and the Niger have utilized parts of their respective pledges to equip and refurbish the Joint Force headquarters in Sévaré and the sector headquarters in Niamey.

36. Bilateral partners have also provided significant support. France and Germany announced a joint initiative in support of the Joint Force in April 2017 and have since co-hosted two planning meetings, in Paris in June and in Berlin in September, to mobilize additional support by States members of the European Union and to coordinate contributions so as to avoid duplication and encourage complementarities. The Franco-German initiative includes support for the sector headquarters in Niamey as well as the provision of air assets and training to the armed forces of Mauritania and the Niger. Apart from the continued efforts of Operation Barkhane since 2014, French bilateral support is focused on the Central Sector and includes vehicles, ammunition, ballistics, protection, a communications system, medical support and optics. Germany is providing support for mobility, ambulances and protection equipment.

37. During the planning meeting in support of the Joint Force, held in Berlin on 19 September and co-chaired by France and Germany, several States members of the European Union, namely, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg and Portugal, also pledged training support. Other European countries also expressed interest in providing support and are currently finalizing the scope of their commitments, with an expectation that pledges could be announced at the donor conference to be held in Brussels in December. At the conclusion of the meeting in Berlin, the Co-Chairs recommended handing over information-sharing and clearing house tasks to the European Union by the end of 2017, so that support for the Sahel from the European Union and its member States could be properly aligned with needs, further showcasing the need for an institutional framework, the coordination of donor support and oversight of spending.

38. The provision of bilateral support to the national armed forces and security services of G-5 Sahel countries will remain critical. While the creation of an integrated regional force remains the objective, its becoming operational and its effectiveness are dependent upon the capacity of each national contingent and the level of interoperability that they can attain. As levels of preparedness and recruitment vary significantly between States members of G-5 Sahel, bilateral partners and multilateral organizations such as the European Union are the best positioned to support those countries directly, given the capabilities of those partners and organizations to equip the Joint Force and render it operational, while targeting support to fill considerable shortfalls. They also have the advantage of

being able to provide major equipment and military-pattern equipment, including armour, weapons, munitions and related systems, as well as maintenance for such equipment and troop self-sustainment. European Union financial support to the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) under the African Peace Facility is an example of a support mechanism used to cover costs such as troop allowances, international and local staff salaries, compensation for death and disability, and peace support operations. The European Union could also enhance its support to the Joint Force through its Common Security and Defence Policy regional initiative and provide mobile advisory and training teams at the Joint Force's headquarters in Sévaré, through the European Union Training Mission, pending a revision of its mandate.

39. Pending the establishment of a financial architecture and disbursement mechanisms for the Joint Force, the European Union has opted for a contractor to oversee the disbursement of its €50 million donation. To that end, on 14 September, the G-5 Sahel Defence and Security Committee signed an agreement that will follow a demand-driven approach and that places the responsibility for submitting and coordinating requests with the Joint Force's chief of staff.

40. A donor conference to mobilize additional pledges and support for the Joint Force, and for the development-oriented Alliance for the Sahel initiative, created in July 2017 by France and Germany, will be held in Brussels in December. The decision by the European Union to disburse its initial pledge through a contractor and to establish a clearing house by the end of 2017 should accelerate the mobilization and disbursement of additional pledges from States members of the European Union and its institutions. The establishment of a sound financing mechanism and a financial architecture would provide the transparency and accountability necessary to encourage additional contributions.

41. Interlocutors from States members of G-5 Sahel have repeatedly expressed their full commitment to the African Union Peace and Security Architecture and their intention to establish the Joint Force within its framework. In return, the African Union has supported regional initiatives to collectively address emerging security threats, for example through the creation of the Nouakchott Process on the enhancement of security cooperation and the operationalization of the African Peace and Security Architecture in the Sahelo-Saharan region and through assessment missions for the establishment of a regional force. The African Union was invited to participate in planning sessions on rendering the Joint Force operational, held in Bamako in early October. In order to determine the role that the African Union would play in support of the Joint Force, the African Union Commission also deployed an assessment team to Mali from 1 to 7 October.

42. The robust counter-terrorism posture envisaged for the Joint Force under phase 2 of the strategic concept of operations would present additional support challenges to the Joint Force and its partners, including the United Nations should it assume a support role (see sect. V below). As the Joint Force transforms itself from its initial posture in the proximity of the borders of the States members of G-5 Sahel into one with the capability to deploy jointly in its contiguous territory, its support requirements will change and subsequent assessments would need to be conducted. The Joint Force will therefore need to develop an integral capacity to self-support highly mobile operations, including aerial support, evacuation capacity, communications and forward logistics, adapted to the terrain and to its operations. If the Joint Force is expected to remain a long-term presence in the region, an exit strategy should be defined for the phasing out of multilateral and bilateral support.

V. Options for United Nations support

43. In the subsequent paragraphs, I outline four options for United Nations support to the Joint Force to make phase 1 of the strategic concept of operations fully operational. Those options range from using the existing mandate of MINUSMA to support the Malian defence and security forces within the framework of the Malian peace process, to an expanded MINUSMA mandate, to the establishment of a dedicated United Nations support office to deliver a logistics and soft support package on a limited scope. The most ambitious option would expand the scope of the dedicated United Nations support office.

44. Regardless of the development and implementation of such options, the United Nations already has the mandate to provide soft support, including ensuring complementarity and better coordination between ongoing military efforts and the Joint Force, through the deployment of liaison officers and technical experts to the Joint Force and the permanent secretariat of G-5 Sahel in Nouakchott.

45. An enhanced United Nations role in supporting the Joint Force would imply a strategic and technical partnership, including a role in planning, coordination, reporting and oversight structures. Dedicated staff and resources, commensurate with the level of support provided, would be required for the management of such a role, which would encompass engagement with the Joint Force on accountability processes, performance management, environmental protection, audits and other compliance frameworks.

A. Security Council-mandated United Nations support package

46. The Security Council has previously approved logistical support packages for non-United Nations missions such as the African Union Mission in the Sudan and AMISOM. As outlined in my report on options for authorization and support for African Union peace support operations (S/2017/454), different types of mission support services determined and authorized by the Council can be delivered by the United Nations to non-United Nations missions through assessed contributions. Specifically, pursuant to Council resolution 2320 (2016), the Secretariat identified four models through which the United Nations can use assessed contributions to support African Union peace support operations. Building on those models, I propose two options for providing more enhanced support to the Joint Force. Both options would require the establishment of a dedicated United Nations support office that would be financed from assessed contributions, in a manner similar to the support provided to AMISOM. As with the AMISOM support package, reimbursement mechanisms, including salaries and stipends, should not be assumed to be component of the support package.

47. Under the most comprehensive option, if so mandated by the Security Council, a dedicated United Nations support office could initially provide a package that would include the following support: aeromedical evacuation capacity and related medical support; life-support services, including rations, fuel and water adapted to the requirements of the Joint Force; consumables, including field defence stores, first aid kits, tactical tentage, accommodation materiel and medical supplies; technical support to apply and implement compliance frameworks, including the human rights due diligence policy; capacity for managing its environmental footprint; maintenance contracts, geospatial, telecommunications and information technology and infrastructure support; and other types of support provided to the Joint Force and its troops.

48. The scope of the support package would eventually be extended to the three sectors, as the implementation of phase 1 of the strategic concept of operations proceeds, including Sector East and its planned 1,300 troops (two additional infantry battalions and the Sector East headquarters in Wour), to cover all elements of the 5,000-strong force. In that case, the area of operations of the support office would be defined as covering the entire territory of the G-5 Sahel countries.

B. Security Council-mandated logistical and soft support package

49. A less ambitious but still significant option could be considered, particularly in view of the phasing of the Joint Force's operations. If approved by the Security Council, a United Nations logistical support package could initially provide or augment the following limited support in the Central and West Sectors: aeromedical evacuation capacity and related medical support; life-support services, including rations, fuel and water adapted to the requirements of the Joint Force; consumables, including field defence stores, first aid kits, tactical tentage, accommodation materiel and medical supplies; technical support to apply and implement compliance frameworks, including the human rights due diligence policy; and capacity for managing its environmental footprint.

50. Geographically, such dedicated United Nations support would be best limited to the Central and West Sectors (estimated 3,700 troops, including the Joint Force headquarters in Sévaré). Bilateral partners could focus their role on initial support for Sector East, where the United Nations has no proximate presence.

51. While voluntary contributions to the Joint Force and its contingents are most efficiently provided bilaterally, a separate United Nations-managed trust fund could be used to target and complement the requirements of the Joint Force in other areas of United Nations competence, such as counter-improvised explosive device capabilities and sourcing of United Nations-pattern (civilian, non-lethal) equipment from existing United Nations systems contracts and strategic deployment stocks.

C. Support requiring an adjustment to the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

52. Pursuant to resolution 2359 (2017), the United Nations is authorized to support the Joint Force through the provision of technical advice and assistance with planning and support in the areas of human rights compliance and training. The exchange of liaison officers and the provision of relevant intelligence to support coordination between MINUSMA and the States members of G-5 Sahel are also specifically requested in the resolution. In addition, pursuant to resolution 2364 (2017), MINUSMA, within its area of operations, supports the Malian defence and security forces, as described below.

53. With additional resources, this support could be extended to include, within the Mission's area of operations, administrative personnel movements by air, logistical convoys and escorts overland; the use of United Nations engineering plant equipment and uniformed MINUSMA engineering enabling units to assist in the preparation of Joint Force locations; emergency vehicle recovery and counter-improvised explosive device support within MINUSMA main supply and patrol routes; and access to bulk water at MINUSMA water collection points. These provisions, as well as access to the Mission's medical and aeromedical capacities and technical support to apply and implement relevant compliance frameworks,

would be included in a technical agreement with the Joint Force. Given the Mission's presence and supply chain in Mali, such support could be mobilized quickly.

54. MINUSMA could extend targeted support to elements of the Joint Force, including non-Malian armed forces, operating in the Central Sector and Sector West within the MINUSMA area of operations, especially in the Malian part of the Joint Force's Central Sector, as well as to the Joint Force headquarters in Sévaré. The Mission could then support the two Malian infantry battalions to be deployed in the West and Central Sectors, the Malian support company deployed with the Joint Force's headquarters in Sévaré, and the battalions of Burkina Faso, Mauritania and the Niger, should they operate on Malian territory. Targeted MINUSMA support to the Joint Force could encompass activities currently in progress with the Malian armed forces, namely, aeromedical evacuation services, access to life-support consumables (fuel and water) during coordinated MINUSMA-Joint Force operations and other support items such as field defence supplies. Such support would, however, not benefit the other five battalions or other elements of the Joint Force, which would be operating outside Malian territory.

D. Support that could be provided by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission under its current mandate

55. Under its current mandate, one of the core mandated tasks of MINUSMA is to support the restoration and extension of State authority, including through the gradual redeployment of the reconstituted Malian defence and security forces in central and northern Mali, within the overall context of support for the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. Whether that would entail support to Malian military units, which would be deployed to the Joint Force at a later stage, remains to be clarified. MINUSMA support to the Malian defence and security forces includes aeromedical evacuation, life support (water and fuel) to units taking part in coordinated operations with MINUSMA and limited provision of field defence materiel. The recent handover of the MINUSMA camp in Léré, Mali, is an example of indirect support, as the camp is expected to accommodate Joint Force elements going forward.

56. However, any future direct or indirect support provided by MINUSMA to the Joint Force would have to be linked to the Mission's ongoing stabilization efforts in central and northern Mali. A detailed technical agreement would also need to be developed between MINUSMA and the Joint Force to ensure cooperation, coordination and deconfliction within the shared area of responsibilities, including the exchange of liaison officers, the establishment of compliance frameworks (including the human rights due diligence policy framework), training and, potentially, in extremis support.

57. The United Nations is also prepared to assist the Joint Force in facilitating contact with vendors who could consider providing systems contracts through the arrangement already provided to the African Union Commission. All the support measures listed above could be carried out within the Mission's existing resources.

VI. Accompanying measures and mechanisms

58. In addition to the financial and material support already mobilized, the G-5 Sahel countries and their partners have an important role in setting up an appropriate normative and institutional framework to consolidate existing efforts and ensure that the Joint Force becomes an integral part of an overarching regional

approach to tackling political and security challenges in the Sahel, as opposed to a stand-alone military operation. International partners, including the United Nations, can provide substantial support in that regard, all the more so as it does not require an adjustment of existing mandates.

A. Support groups

59. As outlined above, the Joint Force requires an overarching political and strategic framework and sound institutional architecture. The command architecture envisages the establishment of two support groups, one at the political level, with a dotted reporting line to the Defence and Security Committee and the Council of Ministers of G-5 Sahel, and one at the technical level, to support the Joint Force Commander. However, beyond their advisory role, these groups could fill existing gaps with regard to the establishment of the institutional framework of the Joint Force that would ensure linkages with the region. The political-level entity could comprise representatives of G-5 Sahel and other international and regional organizations such as the African Union, ECOWAS, the United Nations and the European Union, as well as members of the Security Council. It would promote regional ownership, as well as linkages to and regular information exchanges with relevant entities and initiatives, such as the Nouakchott Process or the Joint Military Staff Committee of the Sahel Region, and ensure that the operations of the Joint Force are aligned with important political processes, such as the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation in Mali. The political-level group could also play an important role in mobilizing and centralizing donor support from partners and overseeing the utilization of those funds. Lastly, it could facilitate the generation of outstanding equipment and capabilities. Interactions and reporting lines among the Conference of the Heads of State, the Council of Ministers, the Defence and Security Committee and the permanent secretariat would have to be further specified.

60. Meanwhile, the technical-level support group, comprising experts and planners, could assist both the chief of staff of the Joint Force and the permanent secretariat in Nouakchott in translating strategic decisions made at the political level into specific operational orders and ensuring coherence between development and security initiatives.

B. Permanent secretariat

61. The permanent secretariat of G-5 Sahel was established in 2015 by the Conference of the Heads of State and is under the authority of the Council of Ministers. As a light structure, it was not envisaged to duplicate existing entities, in particular ECOWAS. Given its established presence and permanent nature, however, the secretariat is expected to collaborate closely with the leadership of the Joint Force. To that end and as outlined above, the United Nations could deploy technical experts to the permanent secretariat to enhance planning and coordination capabilities, in addition to the support provided through UNOWAS. In particular, the G-5 Sahel Security Cooperation Platform, established in November 2015 with the support of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, is expected to increase its capacity in the coming months. Channelling information coming from national services would play a critical support role in efforts to combat organized crime and terrorist organizations. A link to the Regional Counter-Radicalization Unit, and to the early-warning mechanism currently under development, could also be envisaged. In addition, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women is providing technical support to the secretariat on

programme priorities, including gender mainstreaming in security and defence, women's leadership in combating violent extremism, development, governance and resilience, and on the recruitment of a gender adviser.

62. There is also the potential to collaborate on the broad development projects under the Priority Investment Programme. Ensuring coherence and synergies between the Joint Force and the development initiatives championed by the permanent secretariat will also be critical.

C. African Union Peace and Security Architecture

63. As presented in paragraph 41 above, the G-5 Sahel initiative to establish a joint force stems from similar efforts made by the African Union. It is therefore important to ensure linkages with other African Union initiatives for the broader region and to firmly embed the Joint Force within the African Union Peace and Security Architecture. At its 679th meeting in April 2017, when it endorsed the decision made by the G-5 Sahel countries to establish the Joint Force, the Peace and Security Council of the African Union noted the need to develop a general framework of cooperation with countries that were not members of G-5 Sahel, in particular with the States parties to the Nouakchott Process, as many of them faced similar security threats, including porous borders, migration and transnational organized crime. The challenges confronting both the Sahel and other parts of Africa highlight even more strongly the need to revitalize the Nouakchott Process. Furthermore, my assessment team was informed by the G-5 Sahel Defence and Security Committee that inter-institutional consultations had been held with the African Union and ECOWAS, underscoring a willingness by the States members of G-5 Sahel to engage with regional entities. In the light of the work already undertaken by the African Union and the United Nations on a human rights compliance framework for African Union-led peace operations, including pursuant to Security Council resolution 2320 (2016), the two organizations should collaborate on establishing a human rights compliance framework for the Joint Force.

D. Human rights compliance and international humanitarian law framework

64. Regardless of the level of United Nations involvement and the support that it may eventually provide, whether directly or indirectly, to the Joint Force, the risks identified with potential reputational damage for the United Nations make it critical to establish a robust and effective international human rights and humanitarian law compliance framework or a similar mechanism that will allow for the integration of protection considerations in the planning and conduct of military operations, in order to prevent and address human rights violations.

65. Joint Force troops will require some level of screening, mentoring and significant training, not only on human rights and international humanitarian law, but also on the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse, the protection of children and the specificities of counter-terrorism operations. For that purpose, the United Nations and the Joint Force should also agree on modalities for effective mechanisms of joint planning and after-action reviews with civilian-military structures. The Joint Force will have to establish mechanisms to ensure that incidents involving violations of international humanitarian law, harm to civilian objects or civilians (including women and children) and human rights violations (including alleged cases of sexual exploitation and abuse) are reported and then investigated promptly and impartially. Measures should be taken immediately

against the units and individuals allegedly responsible and effective remedies given to the victims. With United Nations support, relevant rules and regulations, as well as guidance on specific issues, such as the handover of children associated with armed groups to civilian child protection actors, rules of engagement, including indirect fire, arrest and detention, interrogations and intelligence collection, will need to be established. Lastly, the international human rights and humanitarian law compliance framework will help to establish the link between Joint Force security operations and other measures to counter terrorism and violent extremism in the region, including through the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel.

66. Such a compliance framework should include the identification and establishment of specific mitigating measures and mechanisms to prevent and address international human rights and humanitarian law violations by the Joint Force, including in the areas of selection and screening, training, planning, after-action review, monitoring and reporting accountability, and rules and regulations. It should also include a detailed risk assessment of United Nations engagement with the Joint Force, adequate mechanisms for monitoring and reporting, including to the Security Council, on possible violations committed by the Joint Force, and coordination mechanisms on the human rights due diligence policy framework at Headquarters and in the field.

67. To support the establishment and implementation of a human rights compliance framework for the Joint Force, the United Nations would need to deploy a core capacity in all States members of G-5 Sahel to provide technical support and carry out monitoring, which would require both adequate resources and support from the relevant United Nations entities and components of MINUSMA.

E. Coordination and intelligence-sharing mechanisms

68. In resolutions 2359 (2017) and 2364 (2017), the Joint Force, MINUSMA and the French forces are urged to ensure and enhance coordination and information-sharing mechanisms, including through the provision of relevant intelligence and liaison officers from the States members of G-5 Sahel to MINUSMA. Pending the generation of its own intelligence assets, the Joint Force will have to rely on shared national intelligence and information provided by international forces. MINUSMA and the French forces have begun deploying liaison officers to the Joint Force's intelligence cells at its headquarters and command posts. In addition, MINUSMA has created a forward command post in Sévaré, staffed with 20 staff officers, including three liaison officers dedicated to the Joint Force. Preparations for the deployment of Joint Force liaison officers to MINUSMA are ongoing. It would be advisable to create additional mechanisms for coordination with other G-5 Sahel security structures, namely the Security Cooperation Platform and the Sahelian Threat Analysis and Early Warning Centre.

VII. Addressing the broader challenges in the Sahel

69. While the support options outlined above could serve to render the Joint Force operational, military operations alone will not suffice to address the security dynamics in the Sahel. In order to tackle the underlying root causes of instability, the Joint Force will be successful only if its operations are complemented by broader initiatives to ensure sustainable development at both the national and regional levels. Furthermore, it is essential that the Joint Force be complemented by effective regional cooperation mechanisms on security information-sharing, countering terrorism and violent extremism and creating synergies for the

empowerment of young people and women in conflict resolution. The United Nations should consolidate gains made through the implementation of its integrated strategy for the Sahel to revamp existing initiatives in support of G-5 Sahel.

70. The G-5 Sahel permanent secretariat oversees a range of ambitious development projects under the Priority Investment Programme (see para. 62 above). These projects represent a long-term, macroeconomic development approach, including large infrastructure and cross-border transportation initiatives. Launching these initiatives will be key to generating new momentum and fostering socioeconomic development to accompany any security response addressing challenges in the Sahel, including through the Joint Force.

71. The international community has also increased its efforts to respond to the multifaceted challenges facing the Sahel, and several comprehensive programmes are being rolled out simultaneously throughout the region. The European Union mobilized €8 billion in 2016, through a wide range of instruments, while the World Bank mobilized about $1.2 billion in 2015, to support resilience and development interventions in G-5 Sahel countries. The World Bank has also partnered with the United Nations to manage the demographic transition. The United States of America has mobilized $840 million for the region since 2012, including through resilience initiatives by the United States Agency for International Development. In July 2017, France, Germany and the European Union launched the Alliance for the Sahel initiative, to fast-track the implementation of programmes in the region. Driven by international cooperation departments, the Alliance focuses on food security, agricultural and rural development, job creation for young people, improving energy infrastructure and strengthening good governance and security. Such initiatives significantly contribute to improving lives and livelihoods throughout the region. The increase in donor spending reflects not only the seriousness of the challenges facing the Sahel, but also donors' sustained commitment to finding lasting solutions. Effective coordination between these initiatives, combined with efforts made by countries of the region, including States members of G-5 Sahel, will increase their positive impact and therefore remains critical.

72. Other regional organizations also play a vital role in responding to the challenges facing the Sahel. Within the framework of the African Union Peace and Security Architecture, and in particular the Nouakchott Process, which was specifically aimed at increasing security cooperation in the Sahelo-Saharan region, legal instruments have been adopted to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism. Meanwhile, ECOWAS has also developed frameworks and initiatives, including the Political Declaration on a Common Position against Terrorism, which includes a counter-terrorism strategy and implementation plan. In 2016, ECOWAS adopted its Regional Action Plan to Address the Growing Problem of Illicit Drug Trafficking, Organized Crime and Drug Abuse in West Africa. ECOWAS and the West African Economic and Monetary Union also work closely with the Permanent Inter-State Committee on Drought Control in the Sahel, based in Ouagadougou, which invests in research for food security and the prevention of drought and desertification.

VIII. Observations

73. The ongoing deterioration of the security situation across the Sahel is cause for extreme concern for the countries and populations of the region, which suffer the direct consequences. The international community remains confronted with a continuous downward spiral into another cycle of widespread violence, despite substantial efforts. For the past several decades, the Sahel has suffered from a

combination of structural challenges, marked by a growing deficit in governance and both natural and human-induced shocks, including the negative effects of climate change and the rise of criminal and terrorist networks across the region. Exploiting existing vulnerabilities, these networks have gradually taken control over the lives of many Sahelians and continue to expand their reach from remote areas to urban centres.

74. It is my conviction that, if the international community stands idly by and does not take urgent action to counter these trends, the stability of the entire region and beyond will be in jeopardy, leaving millions of people at risk of violence, with ordinary civilians paying the heaviest price. Ultimately, the international community will bear the responsibility for such a disastrous scenario. That is why, upon assuming my functions as Secretary-General, I made addressing underdevelopment and insecurity in the Sahel one of my immediate priorities. I remain fully committed to providing the region with the full support of the United Nations, including through its integrated strategy for the Sahel and through political and operational support to initiatives intended to counter the influence of terrorism and organized crime across the region.

75. In that context, the establishment of the Joint Force as initiated by the States members of G-5 Sahel represents an opportunity that must not be missed. It demonstrates their collective will to cooperate in order to address transnational problems affecting the region. I therefore commend them for their determination and speedy progress on the establishment of the Joint Force and their continued efforts towards rendering it fully operational. I also wish to acknowledge the leadership and vision of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, who has played an instrumental role in mobilizing the attention of the international community, notably by anchoring the Joint Force firmly within the framework of the African Union Peace and Security Architecture.

76. I firmly believe that support for the G-5 Sahel initiative stems from the recently adopted resolution 2378 (2017), through which the Security Council has recognized the enormous potential of Africa and expressed its intention to step up support for African initiatives and strengthen the African Union Peace and Security Architecture. Time is of the essence. With the resolve of the African Union to address instability in the Sahel, the international community is called upon to decisively refocus its attention to the urgency of tackling governance, security, development and resilience challenges in the region, in support of ongoing initiatives spearheaded by the Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel countries and, in particular, its current Chair, the President of Mali, Ibrahim Boubacar Keita.

77. I welcome the enormous efforts made to date by the States members of G-5 Sahel towards setting up the Joint Force, including steps taken to develop its legal framework and concept of operations, and the significant investment made to attain initial operational capability for the Joint Force headquarters in Sévaré and the command post for the Central Sector in Niamey. However, as emphasized herein, rendering the Joint Force further operational in order to reach its full capability by March 2018, as outlined in the strategic concept of operations, will prove challenging and will require the sustained mobilization of additional financial and other resources. In that context, the United Nations stands ready to generate the support required.

78. Moving forward, I urge the States members of G-5 Sahel to continue to demonstrate unity of purpose and maintain a continuous dialogue with one another, with a view to further developing a joint vision and shared definition of the end-state for the Joint Force, and to reach out to other stakeholders in their resource-mobilization efforts. In that context, it is my belief that the strategic concept of

operations could benefit from further clarification and elaboration with respect to the sequencing of the phase 1 and the possible launch of a full-fledged regional counter-terrorism force.

79. I wish to stress that the responsibility for mobilizing resources and equipping the Joint Force lies primarily with the States members of G-5 Sahel, in accordance with resolution 2359 (2017). It will be critical for the Joint Force to uphold its obligations under international human rights and humanitarian law to protect civilians and take all feasible precautions to avoid and minimize incidental loss of civilian life, injury to civilians and damage to civilian objects during its operations. This could, moreover, help to facilitate resource mobilization efforts. In that regard, I underscore the importance of establishing a human rights and international humanitarian law compliance framework that is supported by all partners, both politically and financially. Again, the United Nations stands ready to provide its full support. Ensuring cooperation and interoperability with other operations and frameworks, including the Nouakchott Process, Operation Barkhane and MINUSMA, will also be of critical importance.

80. As stated above, reaching full operational capability would require significant investment by the G-5 Sahel countries to address their substantial equipment needs and capability shortfalls. The States members of G-5 Sahel will therefore need assistance from partners. I express my deep gratitude to donors such as the European Union and bilateral partners such as France and Germany, who have already come forward to support the Joint Force. However, the challenges and tasks ahead are daunting. I therefore look forward to the donor conference to be held in Brussels in December 2017, and call upon all partners to extend their support to this important initiative. As I promised the Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel countries, I will personally involve myself in the resource mobilization efforts for this endeavour.

81. I strongly recommend that immediate attention be given to supporting the operations of the Joint Force under phase 1, as outlined in the strategic concept of operations, by focusing at this stage on its first phase. To that end, the present report outlines several possible options for support. I urge the Security Council to be ambitious. I firmly believe that only predictable and sustainable funding and support will enable the Joint Force to contribute to the lasting stabilization of the Sahel. Strong multilateral support would also help to leverage ongoing bilateral support initiatives. I hope that the upcoming visit to the region will offer the members of the Security Council an opportunity to garner further insight into the situation on the ground and to understand the urgency of supporting the Joint Force.

82. The proposed support options would benefit the work of MINUSMA, as the Mission alone cannot address the multiple threats facing the Sahel, many of which exceed its geographical scope and core mandate, but have a direct impact on its security and activities. MINUSMA and the Joint Force are complementary. By contributing to the stabilization of the security situation in the region, United Nations support to the Joint Force, including through MINUSMA, would facilitate rather than jeopardize delivery of the Mission's mandate. It is also important, in such a context, that the efforts aimed at strengthening the Mission's capabilities, as provided under resolution 2364 (2017), be stepped up, in order to enable it to cope with the rapidly evolving security environment.

83. It is my firm belief that strong support by the Security Council, including a robust mandate commensurate with the serious threats that the Joint Force will need to address, would not only give the Joint Force reinforced political legitimacy, but also decisively enhance its ability to fulfil its objectives. In that regard, I wish to recall that any mandate under Chapter VII of the Charter would not automatically trigger funding through assessed contributions.

84. In order to increase human security, military measures should be taken in the context of a broader approach that promotes development, good governance, resilience and the promotion of human rights and the rule of law. In that light, I call upon the States members of G-5 Sahel and their partners to revitalize initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of the recurrent crises and instability in the region. It is time to step up efforts to ensure effective coordination and complementarity between the national and regional initiatives aimed at improving governance and resilience in the Sahel. Without more investment in infrastructure, job creation, good governance and sustainable development, there is a risk of a reversal of the gains attained thus far, including those envisaged by and for the Joint Force. I remain deeply committed to providing such support through the implementation of the United Nations integrated strategy for the Sahel.

85. Addressing governance shortfalls must be complemented by genuine efforts to improve democratic processes and social justice. In that light, I wish to echo those before me who have underlined the importance of advancing the implementation of the Malian peace process in order to contribute to the stabilization of Mali and, by extension, the stability of its Sahelian neighbours. I call once more upon the Malian authorities and the signatory movements to accelerate the implementation of the Agreement on Peace and Reconciliation, so as to facilitate the return and extension of State authority to the remote areas in northern and central Mali, provide peace dividends and basic social services to the population at last and contribute to reversing the negative effects of radicalization. The adoption, on 5 September, of Security Council resolution 2374 (2017), establishing a sanctions regime specifically targeting Mali, is an important tool in that regard and should help to accelerate the implementation of the peace process, in which the United Nations remains strongly engaged, including through the involvement of MINUSMA and the good offices and tireless commitment of my Special Representative for Mali, Mahamat Saleh Annadif.

86. The success of the Joint Force will also depend on the level of political and operational support that its concept of operations will receive from other regional actors. I therefore call upon Heads of State of the G-5 Sahel countries to reach out to other regional actors with a view to strengthening the legitimacy of the Joint Force and the buy-in of other regional entities. I suggest that the African Union assume a strong role in strengthening and coordinating linkages and collaboration in the region, including with ECOWAS and through the Nouakchott Process. As indicated in paragraph 60 above, the G-5 Sahel technical-level support group could provide institutional assistance with creating such a framework, under the leadership of the rotating chairmanship of G-5 Sahel. I also encourage the African Union to explore ways to ensure information-sharing and coordination between the Joint Force and the Multinational Joint Task Force fighting Boko Haram in the Lake Chad basin, to enhance coherence across the ongoing initiatives in the region.

87. Given the impact of the security situation in the Sahel on regional and international peace and security, the complementarity between the Joint Force and MINUSMA and the remaining work that lies ahead for the Joint Force to reach full operational capacity, I recommend that the Security Council continue to periodically review the deployment of the Joint Force and that I continue to report, in close coordination with the States members of G-5 Sahel and the African Union, on the activities of the Joint Force, including on its operationalization, challenges encountered and possible measures for further consideration, as well as on ways to mitigate any adverse impact of its military operations on civilians, including women and children.

88. In conclusion, I would stress that the risks of not supporting the Joint Force vastly outweigh the risks of supporting it. Given the magnitude of the challenges

facing the region. The international community has a collective responsibility to not let this important initiative fail. I therefore reiterate my call upon the members of the Security Council and the international community at large to stand by the States members of G-5 Sahel in this important endeavour.